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## CURRENT OPINION

### **The Use of the Bible by the First Christians**

Professor Harnack, in his recent monograph on *Bible Reading in the Early Church*, gives a most interesting discussion on how the Old Testament was used by the first Christians in their meetings of religious worship and in their homes. They took over the Old Testament Scriptures from the Jews. It had been the fact among the Jews that the Bible was a common book. It was read in the synagogue and it was read in the home. This attitude of Judaism predetermined the history of the Bible in the Primitive-Christian church. The Jewish Christians simply continued their previous private use of the Old Testament. The fact that they had become believers in the Messiahship of Jesus tended to increase their use of the Scriptures in so far as it was now necessary to study not only the law but also the prophets and the other Writings, seeing that these afforded prophetic proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus.

This Jewish and Jewish-Christian use of the Old Testament books simply and easily passed over to the gentile Christians, for the Old Testament Scriptures were then accessible and in actual use by the Jews in the Greek translation (which we speak of as the Septuagint). The use of the Scriptures by the gentile Christians was, however, limited, owing to the fact that they had not, previous to becoming Christians, made use of these Jewish books. This explains why mention is never made of the private use of the Old Testament in the epistles of the New Testament. Timothy is exhorted to public reading (I Tim. 4:13). It was from this public reading that the community gained practically all of its knowledge of the Bible. That Paul did not in general count upon a private reading of the Scriptures in his communities fol-

lows conclusively from Col. 3:16, where mention is made of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs wherewith the individual members should edify themselves and one another, but nothing is said about the reading of Holy Scripture.

### **Paul's Idea of the Lord's Supper**

The evidence regarding the sacramental meals in the mystery-religions is both meager and difficult to interpret, writes Professor Kennedy in the January *Expositor*. He admits, however, as possible that in the mystery-religions certain ritual acts of eating and drinking were believed to impart new life or immortality, and takes for granted that in the sacrificial meals some kind of communion with the Deity was supposed to be established. He thinks likely also that in the commemoration feasts of the period a ritual fellowship with the departed ancestor or hero was a main element in the celebration. He then considers the relationship which may have existed between ideas such as these and Paul's conception of the Lord's Supper. This latter appears most fully in I Cor. 10:1-5, 14-22; 11:17-34. The former passage he holds affords no evidence for the notion that Paul believed in the magical connection of the glorified body of Christ with the worshiper through the medium of the bread and wine. In the latter passage he thinks it is clear that for the Apostle, communion with Christ does not depend upon any sacred rite; its essential condition is a whole-hearted faith. Faith is for Paul the indispensable postulate of all that is of spiritual worth both in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. Those who partook of the Lord's Supper had received and welcomed the good news of salvation through his self-sacrificing death. The bread and the wine were to them symbols of all that that death involved and when

they received them with discernment they were making acknowledgment of the dying love of the Redeemer. But, as in baptism, there was something more for Paul and his converts in the sacred meal than an impressive symbolism. The "acted parable" was amazingly fitted to arouse and invigorate their faith. Thus, by faith they were carried past the symbols to what Holtzmann has fitly called "the sphere of the reconciling grace which rests upon the death of Christ." There they were able to realize with new vividness the actual operation of the divine love working in their behalf. The symbols became a sacrament, a convincing pledge of the mercy of God in Christ the crucified.

#### **The Bible at First the Book of the People**

Professor Harnack has also considered the question how it happened that Christianity was able to preserve in principle its distinctive character and to defend its sacred writings from the encroachment of the priesthood amid a world of mystery-religion. He answers that it was because Christianity was the daughter of Judaism; it was because Christianity, in so far as it was distinct from Judaism, was more spiritual, more lucid, more free, more universal, more simple than that religion; and because with even greater energy than Judaism it strove to make not only the faith but also the sacred discipline of the life the central point of its system. Soon, indeed, the faith and the cultus attracted to themselves and acquiesced in very much that belonged to the mystery-religions, but the essential characteristics of Christianity—the belief in God as the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, as the father of mankind, as the father of Jesus Christ, the good news addressed to all men, the faith in the Savior of the world, the *regula disciplinæ* for the new humanity—all these fundamental characteristics could not possibly be proclaimed in mysteries, and at the

same time could demand an unrestricted use of the Bible. This unrestricted right to listen daily to the direct voice of God might have proved the strongest bulwark of Christian independence, freedom, and equality, and a lasting defense against complete subjugation to sacerdotalism and mystery. But as time went on the laity made less and less use of their privilege. When in the twelfth century a lay Christianity, based upon the private reading of the Bible, struggled into the light of day, it was now too late. The church of priesthood and mystery began then to take measures, at first cautiously and tentatively, with a view to withdrawing the Bible from the common people.

#### **The Reforms of Pius X**

In the *Constructive Quarterly* for March, Father Wynne, of the editorial staff of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, summarizes the "Reforms of Pius X." In every document that has come from the present Pope, comparatively little space is given to establishing a doctrine or a principle. These are taken as granted by the members of the hierarchy to whom such letters are usually addressed. But the chief space is given to practical suggestions and directions. The principal means by which the church must endeavor to re-establish all things in Christ is the proper formation of the clergy, by carefully selecting the candidates, by training them strictly in seminaries, by safeguarding them against rationalism, by showing preference for those who keep up interest in their studies without losing their zeal in active ministry. Abuses in the chant used in liturgical services have been reformed. In view of the exigencies of modern life, the number of days have been reduced which the faithful are obliged to observe as days of precept. Uniformity has been introduced in the new arrangement of the Psalms in the Breviary. Frequent communion among the laity has been re-established.

Teaching of the catechism has been emphasized as a means of overcoming indifference in religious matters, and as a powerful antidote to the social unrest and disorders now so prevalent. The regulations of the church in regard to marriage have been simplified. The pronouncements of Leo XIII on social democracy and popular Christian movements have been reiterated. Modernism has been condemned and stamped out.

### **Paul's Message to Religion**

In the *Constructive Quarterly* for March, Professor Benjamin W. Bacon discusses "Paul's Message to Religion." The influence of Paul has been of no slight moment in the development of the racial religious consciousness. Should we not be able in some measure to identify and define it? There was in his time a world-wide famine of the word of God. Various cults were being propagated in which the motive was the effort of awakening personality to triumph over finite weakness and mortality by contact with the unseen Source of life, knowledge, and power. Greek philosophic thought had undermined the authority of Olympus, making room for many an "unknown God." It had also called into being a sense of individual souls and their worth. How could there fail to be a world-wide eruption of the volcanic fires of man's religious nature?

St. Paul is the only consistent, logical, and thoroughgoing upholder of the doctrine that the Jewish legal economy was universal but *temporary*. His doctrine of the Cross is that it is God's signal to humanity of altered relationship to himself, as much a signal to the Gentile who has no written law, as to the Jew. This temporal feature is the real novelty of the gospel of St. Paul. The essential and permanent thing is his consciousness of having been admitted through contact with the spirit of Jesus into Jesus' *sense of sonship*. To St. Paul the essential

thing in Christianity was "the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father." The very word is appropriated from Jesus; for the Spirit is his Spirit, and he that receives it "puts on" Christ.

### **The Baptists and Church Unity**

When the question is What will Baptists sacrifice for the sake of church union? President George E. Horr, of Newton Theological Institution, answers:

I. Northern Baptists by their union with the Free Baptists have practically remanded the matter of so-called "close Communion" from the denomination to the individual church.

II. We may properly countenance the public dedication of infants on the part of their parents to the Christian life with the insistence that the observance shall not be called baptism or in any way confused with it.

III. We are showing by the organization of the Northern Baptist Convention and the increasing vogue of permanent councils that tendencies toward representative government are bringing us into closer affinity with more centralized communions.

IV. We may appropriately welcome a larger liturgical element in worship. This attitude on our part would do much to break down a foe to church unity that has been more serious than many suppose.

### **Pictures of the Joyous Christ**

The oldest representation of Christ shows him as a joyful good shepherd rather than as a man of sorrow, is the statement of Dr. Franklin Hamilton in the *Christian Advocate*. He bases his view upon what is claimed to be the oldest known sculptured Christ, now in the Imperial Museum in Constantinople.

The most familiar representations of Christ come to us from the Middle Ages and portray his death upon the cross. It is mainly from these that the modern church has derived the notion that Jesus was essentially the Man of Sorrows. The figure in Constantinople is claimed to contradict this view. The writer thus describes it:

It is battered, squat, and unsymmetrical. Untrained hands formed it. The casual eye would scarce deign to rest upon such a monument. . . . It is the earliest known carved Christ representation of our Lord . . . brought from an early Christian tomb in Asia Minor. It shows an oriental shepherd of grotesque but gentle mien. He is a toiler, a peasant. He is coarsely garbed and smiling. On his broad bent shoulder rests a lamb.

### Alexander the God

In the *Expositor* for February, Cuthbert Lattery, S.J., in an article entitled "Alexander the God," attempts to prove that the great Macedonian conqueror set himself up as an object of worship in Egypt on the occasion of his subjugation of that country.

In brief, the argument advanced is that in the light of such a presupposition the incidents of the visit to the Oasis of Ammon, the banquet at Baktra, the mutiny at Opis, and the promulgation of the decree demanding divine honors from the Greek cities are most clearly understood.

### Eucken on Christianity

The sense in which Rudolph Eucken finds Christianity the "permanent and universal" religion is set forth by Dr. E. E. Slosson in the *Independent* of February 27.

Eucken, says Dr. Slosson, discovers in "historic Christianity all the essentials of a permanent and universal religion, capable, when properly understood and presented, of satisfying the severe requirements of modern thought and feeling." The statement is contained in a character sketch of the distinguished German professor and an outline of his philosophy. Eucken is at present delivering a course of lectures in America.

Eucken's idea of how a man attains the spiritual life is set forth by the writer as follows: "Eucken steers carefully between the position of Buddhism, that each man must work out his own salvation without any help from above, and the extreme Calvinistic position, that man is purely passive and

altogether undeserving." On this point Eucken is quoted thus: "The change [from the lower to the higher life] cannot possibly *happen* to man; it must be taken up by his own activity; it needs his own decision and acceptance. Only by ceaseless activity can life remain at the height to which it has attained."

This [comments Dr. Slosson] leads to the distinctive form of Eucken's philosophy, known as activism. This is like pragmatism in its rejection of the mere intellectual view of life and in basing truth upon a more spontaneous and essential activity. But Eucken's objection to pragmatism is stated in the following language: "Pragmatism is more inclined to shape the world and life in accordance with human conditions and needs than to invest spiritual activity with an independence in relation to these, and apply its standards to a testing and sifting of the whole content of human life. . . ." It will be seen that Eucken does not fall in with the tendency of the times to subordinate the individual to society.

### The Cycle of History

The Chinese revolution which has resulted in the overthrow of the empire and the establishment of the republic shows that history repeats itself even in the Orient, according to Rev. A. H. Smith in "The Relation of the Chinese Revolution to Human Progress" in the January *Chinese Recorder*.

He maintains that history shows the rise of nearly all republics to have occurred in much the same way, and that in this case China has been no exception to the rule. He says:

The great dynastic changes have been of a practically invariable pattern. A reigning house has arisen, flourished, begun to decay, until—as a protest against misrule—the people, taught by the ancient Sages, began to rise in more or less open rebellion. By degrees the whole empire was aflame, insurrection expanding into war, until fire and sword devastated the land.